

Krishna Yadav and Casteism

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Much has been written about the Krishna Yadav episode, but there is still room for a few more reflections.

The first is that it perhaps signifies the coming of age of the *Dalit* or *Dalit-Bahujan* movement that no one excepting his own family has seriously come to the defence of Krishna Yadav saying that the allegations against him are an upper caste conspiracy, or — worse still — that there is nothing wrong if a leader from the *Dalit-Bahujan* communities does what upper caste leaders have been doing for decades. Such arguments only harm the cause of the anti-caste movement, for it is robbed of its normative essence once it is used to defend unethical conduct, and it is salutary that the fact is well recognized now.

But while such a defence is deservedly eschewed, it is not that there is nothing to be said about the selective response to corruption in public life that turns around caste among other things. Some time ago, there was justified comment on the way Suddala Devaiah was eased out of the Cabinet, whereas Kodela Siva Prasada Rao was vehemently defended. Today we again see the clear difference in the way the Chief Minister reacts to Krishna Yadav and Rama Subba Reddy. If the stamps scam has done harm to the reliability and credibility of the system of property disposal, Rama Subba Reddy's crime belongs to the genre that has devastated public life in Rayalaseema for decades.

But going beyond Andhra Pradesh, why is it that in recent times, leaders belonging to the backward communities are getting caught in corruption cases with a frequency disproportionate to their share in it? It is really quite striking. There were many villains in the *Tehelka* episode but only Bangaru Laxman got caught by the camera. Most Chief Ministers of the current generation have abused their power left and right, but it appears that Mayawati alone among them is going to 'count the prison bars', as the Telugu colloquialism has it. Corruption, misappropriation of public funds, misuse of power etc., are sins so well entrenched in our State that no one in power is altogether free from the vices, but again it is Krishna Yadav whom the law catches up with. Don't be in a hurry and object that what he has done is many times more serious

than the more routine forms of abuse of power that all ruling party leaders indulge in. His is no doubt a serious offence, but as for the rest of them, we will know only when we know. Until then let us beware of the complacency that says that the others do no more than take a ten percent cut from civil contractors, a form of misappropriation that is almost no longer regarded as such.

Is it their inexperience? After all, to be successful as a corrupt public person is not as easy as it seems when you are discussing other people's misdeeds. The inexperienced may easily get tripped up. Is it that they have fewer protectors? This too could be true. Certainly, there is little doubt that if the Maharashtra police had not caught on to the doings of Krishna Yadav, the *Telugu Desam Government*, which could not but have known of what was happening, would probably have slept over the scam for a lot more time to come, but nevertheless it is possible that the protective mechanism that saves the corrupt in public life does not work as well in their case as in the case of the upper castes.

Is it that society feels more outraged at such corruption since it expects the beneficiaries of the politics of social upliftment to behave themselves with such modesty as would become their station and not aspire to ape their social betters in all matters? That could be true, too. One often senses a grouse subtly expressed that there is something outrageous about people who ask for their share of power on grounds of equity and then go on to abuse it. Abuse by those who stake claim to power as a matter of inheritance does not seem half so outrageous.

In fact, one has the rather blunt suspicion that the misdeeds of the Krishna Yadavs, the Bangaru Laxmans and the Mayawatis gets so much exposure because articulate society (which is mostly upper caste) takes a certain pleasure in discussing the corrupt deeds of SC and BC leaders. On the one hand it seems to puncture the righteousness that informs the expression *Dalit-Bahujan*, and on the other hand the contempt for corruption that can be openly expressed merges quite neatly with the carefully hidden contempt for *Dalit-Bahujan* communities, and permits the latter to be given expression under the cover of the former.

It takes a bad case to raise such questions, because people would be more careful in less bad cases. Raising them is not intended to defend what is bad about the case, but to ferret out hidden attitudes that are declared eradicated, much like malaria.